



A Union of Professionals

Classroom Tips

Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships



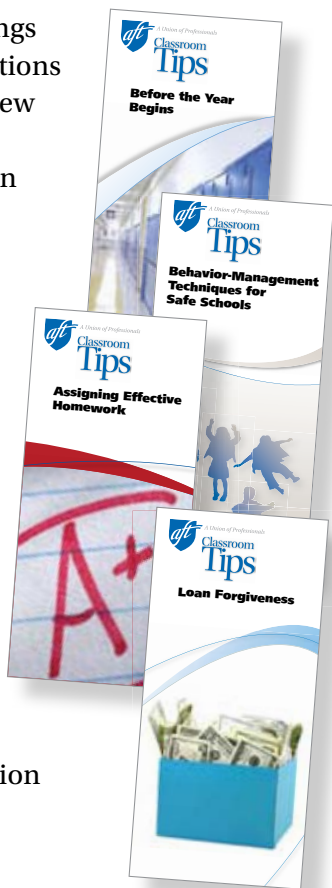
Classroom Tips

Each new school year brings high hopes, great expectations and challenges for both new and seasoned educators.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has developed a series called *Classroom Tips* to help educators start the year off right and anticipate the year ahead.

Classroom Tips is developed with you, the educator, in mind. The tips in this collection are taken from real classroom experiences and are part of the AFT's Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) professional development program.

The AFT is a leader in providing educators the resources they need to help them succeed. Visit AFT's Web site for classroom resources at www.aft.org/tools4teachers today.



Effective communication is essential for building school-family partnerships. It constitutes the foundation for all other forms of family involvement in education.

Parent Benefits

Positive parent-school communications benefit parents. The manner in which schools communicate and interact with parents affects the extent and quality of parents' home involvement with their children's learning. For example, schools that communicate bad news about student performance more often than recognizing students' excellence will discourage parent involvement by making parents feel they cannot effectively help their children.

Parents also benefit from being involved in their children's education by getting ideas from school on how to help and support their children, and by learning more about the school's academic program and how it works. Perhaps most important, parents benefit by becoming more confident about the value of their school involvement. Parents develop a greater



appreciation for the important role they play in their children's education.

When communicating with parents, consider your remarks in relation to the three categories that influence how parents participate. For example, are you communicating about:

- Classroom learning activities?
- The child's accomplishments?
- How the parents can help at home with their child's learning?

Student Benefits

Substantial evidence exists showing that parent involvement benefits students, including raising their academic achievement. There are other advantages for children when parents become involved—namely, increased motivation for learning, improved behavior, more regular attendance, and a more positive attitude about homework and school in general.

Teacher Benefits

Research shows that parental involvement can free teachers to focus more on the task of teaching children. Also, by having more contact with parents, teachers learn more about students' needs and home environment, which is information they can apply toward better meeting those needs. Parents who are involved tend to have a more positive view of teachers, which results in improved teacher morale.

Good Two-Way Communication

Good two-way communication between families and schools is necessary for your students' success. Not surprisingly, research shows that the more parents and teachers share relevant information with each other about a student, the better equipped both will

be to help that student achieve academically.

Opportunities for two-way communication include:

- Parent conferences;
- Parent-teacher organizations or school community councils;
- Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for parent review and comment;
- Phone calls; and
- E-mail or school Web site.

For more information on building relationships with parents, visit www.aft.org/tools4teachers.

Working Together

- Parent-Teacher Partnerships
- Creating a Classroom Team
- SEP Teams

Tools For Teachers

- Classroom Management
- Working Together
- Teacher as Teacher
- Teaching as a Career
- Classroom Materials
- Working with Special Populations
- Funding Opportunities

Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships

Good two-way communication is necessary for student success. Parents and teachers who share relevant information about a student are better able to help that student achieve academically.

Good two-way communication means that parents are more likely to be more involved with their children's learning at home. And, teachers see an improvement in student achievement, improvement in student's self image, a reduction in disruptive classroom behavior, and improved teacher-student relationships.

Good communication means sharing good news, calling parents on the phone, and meeting parents in person.

Share Good News

Make sure to share good news instead of only bad news. Parents are accustomed to having schools contact them only when their children are in need of academic or behavioral remediation. When you make calls to share positive information, be prepared for them to sound surprised—pleasantly surprised. Another added benefit to positive communications: Parents are more likely to be involved when good news is shared more often than bad.

Teacher's on the phone

During his 25 years in the classroom, retired high school science teacher Thomas Hayden of New York learned the value of positive reinforcement for parents as well as students. Each week, he would make "sunshine calls" in the evening to parents. They expected bad news about their child, but his purpose was to pass on good news from that day or week. He reports that when the student came to class the next day, he or she always said something about their parent's positive reaction to the phone call. When all students heard about the calls, they asked how they could earn such a "reward."

Tips for Using the Phone to Communicate with Parents

Sometimes, as a new teacher, it's difficult to make the first call to a parent or guardian. Preparing for the call will make it easier. Before making a call, write down the reasons for the call. One reason is simply to introduce yourself to the parent or guardian. These tips can help you prepare:

- Introduce yourself.
- Tell parents what their child is studying.
- Invite them to open house and other school functions.
- Comment on their child's progress.
- Inform them of a special achievement, such as "Student of the Week."
- Inform them of their child's strengths or share an anecdote.

Listen to a sample "Get Acquainted" phone call.

Meeting with Parents

Face-to-face meetings with parents help establish an ongoing conversation, a sense of trust and shared information, and will help your students. Use this [checkboxlist](#) to help ensure productive parent-teacher conferences.

Open House, Orientation or Curriculum Night

The school hosts and orientation night during the first week or two of school. This event provides an opportunity for parents to learn about schoolwide policies and programs such as discipline, homework, extracurricular activities, scheduling, and how parents can get involved. We've created a [list of ideas for activities at open house](#) or curriculum night in your school.

Communication Strategies

Personal contact, including conferences, home visits, telephone calls, and curriculum nights or open houses, seems to be the most effective form of communication and may be among the most familiar. However, the establishment of effective school-home communication has grown more complex as society has changed.

The great diversity among families means that it is not possible to rely on a single method of communication that will reach all homes with a given message. It is essential that a variety of strategies, adapted to the needs of particular families and their schedules, be incorporated into an overall plan. Some strategies to consider include:

- Parent newsletters;
- Annual open houses;
- Curriculum nights;
- Home visits (where applicable);
- Phone calls;
- Annual school calendars;
- Inserts in local newspapers;
- Annual grandparents or “special persons” days;
- Board of Education spokesperson or communications officer at PTA meetings;
- Homework hotlines;
- Annual field days;
- Notices and handouts in local markets, clinics, churches, mosques, temples or other gathering sites;
- Web site for the school;
- Workshops for parents; and
- Communications that are focused on fathers as well as mothers.

Effective communication strategies involve:

- **Initiation:** Teachers should initiate contact as soon as they know which students will be in their classroom for the school year. Contact can occur by means of an introductory phone call or a letter to the home introducing yourself to the parents and establishing expectations.
- **Timeliness:** Adults should make contact soon after a problem has been identified, so a timely solution can be found. Waiting too long can create new problems, possibly through the frustration of those involved.
- **Consistency and frequency:** Parents want frequent, ongoing feedback about how their children are performing with homework.
- **Follow-through:** Parents and teachers each want to see that the other will actually do what they say they will do.
- **Clarity and usefulness of communication:** Parents and teachers should have the information they need to help students, in a form and language that makes sense to them.

Surprise a Parent

Parents are not accustomed to hearing unsolicited positive comments from teachers about their children, especially in a phone call from the school. Imagine how you would feel, as a parent, if you were contacted by a teacher or the school principal and told that your son or daughter was doing well in school, or that your child had overcome a learning or behavior problem. When you make calls to share positive information with parents, be prepared for them to sound surprised—pleasantly surprised.

Research shows that school-home communication is greatly increased through personalized positive telephone contact between teachers and parents. Remember, when a phone call from school conveys good news, the atmosphere between home and school improves. When you have

good news to share, why wait? Make the call and start a positive relationship with a parent.

Phone Guidelines

Sometimes, as a new teacher, it's difficult to make the first call to a parent or guardian. Preparing for the call will make it easier. Before making a call, write down the reasons for the call. One reason can be simply to introduce yourself to the parent or guardian. Here are several guidelines you can use as you prepare:

- Introduce yourself.
- Tell the parents what their child is studying.
- Invite the parents to an open house and/or other school functions.
- Comment on their child's progress.
- Inform them of their child's achievements (e.g., "Student of the Week").
- Inform them of their child's strengths or share an anecdote.

To hear a sample teacher-parent phone call, visit **www.aft.org/tools4teachers**.



Five Great Reasons to Join a Union of Professionals

The American Federation of Teachers:

1 Supports you in the classroom. Effective learning only takes place when high-quality teachers, with the support of other competent professionals, have the materials and assistance needed to accomplish the task. Your union is a strong advocate for quality classroom materials that are aligned to the standards of achievement we expect our students to meet. We also insist that state and district assessments for measuring student progress are aligned with these standards and that the assessments be used appropriately to support student learning.

2 Helps you prepare. No matter how well prepared you may have been before entering the classroom, there is always room for improvement. Ongoing professional development that meets you at your point of need is vital for continued growth as an educator. The AFT and its affiliates deliver some of the finest professional development programs available; and in situations where ours are not available, we advocate and broker for you to receive the best training possible.

3 Stands up for you. Whether the discussion is taking place in the White House, in the halls of Congress, on the floor of your statehouse, in colleges of education or in your local editorial pages, you can be sure that union representatives are weighing in assertively, ensuring that the collective voice of educators comes through clearly and effectively.

4 Advocates for your profession. No one enters the teaching profession without a strong desire to help children reach their potential. Yet, at times the realities of life make this calling difficult to stick with. Adequate salaries and benefits are essential in order to keep the best teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff in our public schools. Working conditions such as manageable class sizes, adequate teaching materials, and discipline policies that support teaching and enhance student learning are important factors in ensuring that the best teachers remain in the classroom.

5 Keeps you informed. *American Educator* is one of the most highly respected journals available to keep you informed on current thinking in public education by some of the most capable thinkers and doers in the field. *American Teacher* will keep you on top of the challenges and successes of your colleagues across the country. And a host of optional publications, as well as a comprehensive Web site that will assist you in addressing the particular needs of your school and classroom, provide the balance of a professional literature package that is second to none.



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